Teach Your Dog to Pull

by Mike Sternberg

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WEIGHT PULLING

The sport of weight pulling has been in existence since the gold rush days of Alaska and northern Canada. Trappers and miners would wager gold or fur pelts on the strongest dog. One story that best illustrates weight pulling is "The Call of the Wild" by Jack London. Buck is asked to pull 1,000 lbs. over a distance of 100 yards in minus 60 degree weather.

Weight pulling is quite different now. The distance is only 16 feet with a time limit of 60 seconds. Depending on the snow and weather conditions, pulls of over a ton are fairly common.

Weight pulling has become very popular in recent years. In its first season (84-85) the International Weight Pull Association (IWPA) sanctioned over thirty weight pulls. This doesn't include pulls sanctioned by other weight pull organizations or the non-sanctioned and fun pulls that have taken place all across the country.

The reason for I.W.P.A. sanctioned pulls is that dogs and their handlers can compete on an International basis under the same rules. Therefore, wherever you compete, you can be assured that the rules will be the same.

Some of the reasons this sport has grown are: it only takes one dog to compete; any size or breed of dog may enter; spectator appeal; and the positive exposure that the sport gets is well received by its sponsors.

Whether you are interested in training your dog to pull purely for your own recreation and enjoyment, or for competition, this training manual was designed for you.

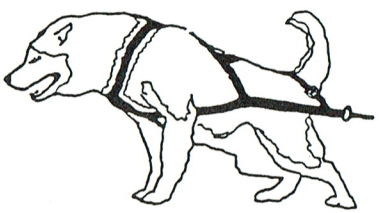
EQUIPMENT

The most important piece of equipment is the harness. There are several types of harness available for sled dogs. The only suitable harness for serious heavy pulling is the freight harness. The freight harness distributes the load on the chest and shoulders of the dog. Made of nylon, the freight harness is padded around the neck and chest portions to prevent cutting-in or chafing. It should have a spreader bar (a wooden dowel) placed horizontally behind the dog's rear legs to prevent the side straps from chafing the dog's legs or confining his movement. Some harness makers make a special weight pull harness. The weight pull harness is designed exactly the same as the freight harness only more heavily padded for additional protection. The racing style, or recreation harnesses used for dog sledding, may be used for initial training with light weights. Do not use them for weight pulling because the load is taken higher on the dog's back. This reduces efficiency and puts unnecessary strain on the back.

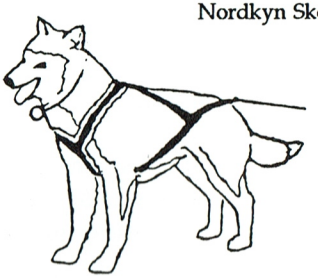
The fit of the harness is critical since no dog can pull his maximum in an uncomfortable harness. The chest portion must not restrict his breathing by riding up and pressing on his windpipe. The neck and shoulders should fit snugly without binding or restricting movement. The fit of the harness should be checked regularly and adjusted or replaced as needed, especially if the dog is still growing.

Use your imagination when looking for something to pull. Tires, logs, carts, wagons, toboggans and sleds all have been used for training. If you are training with a cart, wagon or anything that will roll or slide easily, be prepared to stop the load before it reaches the dog. The same thing applies when choosing weight. Try to choose objects which will not roll and hit the dog if he stops suddenly. Remember, especially in the beginning, a bad experience for the dog can destroy his enthusiasm for the entire proceedings.

Nordkyn Sketch



Freight Harness



Racing/Recreation Harness

Other necessary equipment includes a collar, a leash, and a 15 to 20 foot long lead with snap, persistence and patience.

You can make all of your own equipment, although it may be wiser and more practical to buy the harness from an experienced harness maker to ensure proper fit. Considering the time involved, especially if you're making your first harness, a manufactured harness is a small investment. Currently a good freight or weight pull harness sells for $25.00 to $35.00. A recreation/racing harness sells for about $6.00 to $14.00. Leashes and leads can be made from 1/4" or 3/8" braided poly rope. Poly rope and snaps can be purchased at most hardware stores. One inch nylon webbing for harnesses and collars can be purchased at most hardware or surplus stores. An old tire is hard to beat both in function and in price for something to pull. They come in all sizes and are free at most tire shops. Old inner tubes can be filled with sand and used for weight. Bricks, concrete blocks and old chains all make good weights. The idea is to provide resistance or friction for training and conditioning. A tire laid flat will provide more resistance than a cart or sled of the same weight.

Left, A.K. C. Alaskan Malamute CH. Wakon's Glacier Ice Bear.
Right, Fritz an Alaskan Husky.
Two excellent weight pullers.
Photo by Robert Brunn

CHOOSING THE DOG

The sport of sled dog weight pulling is open to any dog regardless of size, sex or breed. Many breeds not normally thought of as sled dog types have made excellent weight pullers. The International Sled Dog Racing Association weight pull champions for 1983 were: Alaskan Husky (50 pounds and under class); German Shepherd (51-80 pound class); Alaskan Malamute (81-110 pound class) and English Mastiff (111 pounds and over class). The sex of the dog seems to have little to do with its success as a puller. The most important factors are soundness and health. Any unsoundness, especially in the rear, will adversely affect a dogs' ability to pull the heavier weights. If you are serious about using your dog for competition weight pulling, I would recommend having the dogs' hips X-rayed.

Since weight pulling places mental as well as physical stress on the dog, temperament should also be considered. The shy dog may become confused and frightened by crowds and noise at a competition, while the dog that is aggressive to the point of being interested only in fighting may be unable to develop the close relationship with his handler which is necessary to his success as a competitor.

The age at which to begin training depends on the physical and psychological readiness of the individual dog. Assuming that the dog has been properly socialized and has a good relationship with his handler, a dog can be introduced to the feel of the harness and light weights at a young age. Some dogs have been started as young as three months;

I.S.D.R.A. Gold Medal Winner "Glacier" pulling 2138 pounds at Cook City, Montana in 1984.

almost all are ready for basic training by six months. It should be emphasized that the purpose of early training is to accustom the dog to the feel of the harness, of being able to move a weight easily, and the proper response to the command to pull. A dog's first few experiences in harness are often critical. Young dogs can easily be soured on the whole idea if the experience is not a pleasant one. If a young dog reacts badly to his first time in harness it may be best to wait a while before trying again rather than forcing the issue. Find something that your dog likes to do. Now, use that to your advantage. Example: ever have a favorite shirt? Or a favorite anything for that matter. The principal is the same for your dog. You associate your favorite shirt with some positive event that has happened to you. Whatever the event was, it made you feel good about that shirt. It gave you confidence. The same thing works for your dog. Build up his confidence. Rather than letting your dog associate his harness with drudgery, help him associate it with something that he likes . . . like eating. Most dogs like to eat. Wait until feeding time, then put your dogs harness on to feed him. The same thing can work with going for a run, chasing a ball or a frisbee or whatever your dog considers fun. Put on his harness every time you do this favorite thing and it won't take long and he will associate his harness with a positive event. Keep it fun. He won't work enthusiastically if he doesn't like the task. Build up his confidence, then go back to pulling. Sometimes you need to use your imagination.

"Rocky" 170 pound English Mastiff pulling people at Priest Lake, Idaho in 1984.
(Rocky is owned by Bill Fitzpatrick of Helena, Montana.)

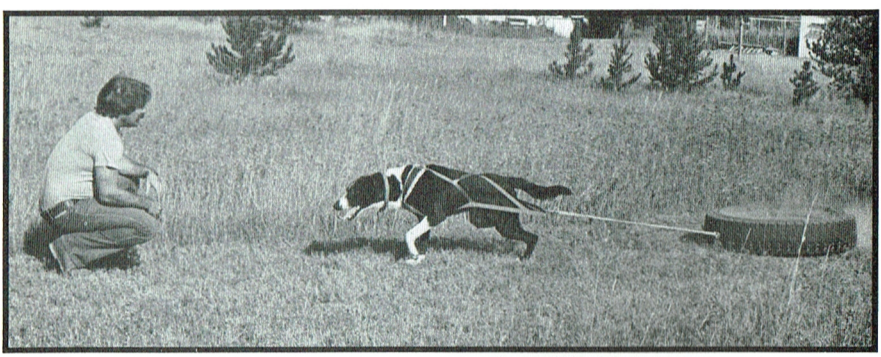
No dog is ready for heavy weights or competition before a full year of age. A dog whose skeletal and muscular system is still immature can be permanently damaged by the physical stress of pulling heavy weight. It is also very discouraging to a dog to be asked to pull more weight than he is physically capable of pulling. Many excellent weight pullers have failed to realize their full potential because their handlers tried to push them too far too fast.

TRAINING

Successful trainers refer to "attitude" or "heart". A well conditioned and trained dog with fairly good physical capabilities will invariably outperform a poorly trained dog of superior physical strength. Attitude is an integral part of a good weight pull dog. Remember; short, fun lessons and positive reinforcement in the beginning can go a long way in developing the proper attitude. A bad experience in the early development can be a major setback.

Pride of accomplishment is a real thing to a dog. When he does well, communicate your approval with affection. Make him earn your approval. You must be completely honest if you are to expect an honest effort in return. Never demand performance beyond his capabilities, but never expect less than an honest effort. Carefully study your dog so that you understand his capabilities. You must realize when your dog is doing his best and be careful not to demand more. Dogs can be forced, by threat of punishment, to put out some effort; but they will do much better when they thoroughly enjoy their task.

The purpose of training is to teach your dog the most efficient use of his strength. Many dogs who have the physical capability to pull heavy



Fritz pulls with enthusiasm. Attitude is an integral part of a good weight pull dog.
Photo by Robert Brunn

weights fail, simply because they have not been trained. Before you begin training, you should decide on either the call or drive method. Current rules allow you the option of driving your dog from behind or calling him from a position twenty feet in front of him. I recommend teaching the dog both methods and seeing which one works best on the individual dog. The driving method may require more training, but it is sometimes preferred since it can promote a strong feeling of teamwork between the driver and the dog. In the following paragraphs, I have described one approach for the call method and two for the drive method.

The Call Method of Training

Harness your dog and hook him up to a light drag. This drag can be a tire, or whatever you choose, but should be very light and easily moved. Remember, in the beginning you are only training your dog's mind, he is capable of handling much more weight, but at this point, you are only interested in training him to obey your command. Hook a leash or lead to his collar. Have the dog walk to your side pulling the drag. If necessary, urge him to come to you by the lead. As soon as he comes praise and pet him. The first few pulls don't need to be very long. Ten feet is long enough. After three or four short pulls, if he shows no fear and no particular concern for the drag, he is ready to go on. If he is frightened of the drag or refuses to pull, repeat the lesson, if necessary with even lighter weight. He must master this first step before going on.

Put your dog on "Stay" properly aligned in front of the drag. Move out approximately 15 feet (length of your long lead) and face him. Call

Old tires make excellent training aids. Chains, concrete blocks, bricks, etc. can be used to add resistance.
Photo by Robert Brunn

his name and the command "Come". If necessary gently tug with the lead as you call. Always pet him at the end of his pull. In the early stages of training it is advisable to call your dog from a crouched or hands and knees position. This position encourages him to keep his head down, and all four paws on the ground. This is important as a dog can pull much more with four paws than with two. The best weight pullers never have more than one paw off of the ground at the same time. About five or six pulls are enough for one session.

When he is enthusiastically coming to you on command, gradually start increasing the load. Never ask him to pull more than he can. He must develop total confidence that the load back there is going to come because you told him it would.

Three or four practice sessions a week are sufficient. Drop the use of the lead as soon as possible. In competition leads are not allowed, and the continued use of a lead in training may turn it into a psychological crutch for the dog.

The Drive Method

The first step in training is to get your dog to move out in front of you on command. One method is to put your dog in harness with a long tugline or leash and run beside the dog, gradually dropping back until you are behind him. Most dogs get the idea in a few sessions and will cheerfully stay ahead of you. However, some dogs feel deserted when they can't see the handler, and it may take some time before they are confident enough to move out in front of you. Another problem is the dog who starts to move but then stops to sniff or tries to turn around. A sharp NO! followed by the command to Go (Hike! Dig! and Pull! are all commonly used) is usually enough to discourage this type of misbehavior. If he persists, a sharp forward jerk on the collar and a harsh reprimand is in order, or you can switch to the other method of training.

The second method utilizes a choke collar, a sturdy post or tree, and fifty feet of sturdy rope or cord. Run the cord behind the tree so that one end can be hooked to the dog's collar while you hold the other end in your hand. You can now pull the dog forward while remaining behind him. The training is similar to recall training for the obedience dog, except the dog must learn to move away on command rather than coming. Start by holding the dog's collar, giving him the command to pull, and moving towards the post with him. Go at least twenty feet and give him the command to stop (Whoa! or Stop!). The next step is to get him moving without you beside him. If he will now move on your command, fine—if not, pull the loose end of the cord to get him moving. Short, sharp jerks are more effective than a steady pull. This method is especially good since you can easily control the dog's forward motion and correct bad habits such as stopping to sniff or turning around. Eventually the dog will move out without being tugged by the collar,

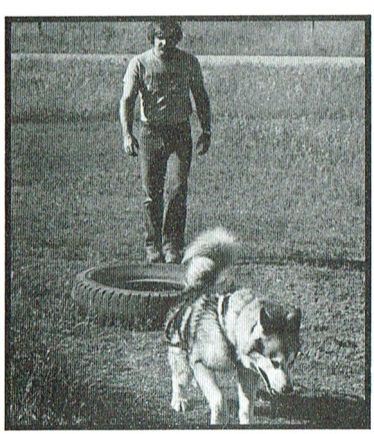
and when he is letter-perfect, you can remove the cord. If at any point in later training, the dog fails to move out or generally starts goofing around, you can return to this method for a quick refresher course.

The Long Arm Method

You may want to try the long arm approach. Ever say to yourself, if my arm was just another couple of feet longer, I could grab that dog by the collar and keep him out in front of me. This method may be for you. Attach a short lead (about 2 feet long) to a seven or eight foot long section of plastic pipe, cane pole or even a stick. Now by attaching the lead to the dog's collar, you can stand six to eight feet behind your dog and actually push your dog forward by his collar. Caution should be used when introducing your dog to this new "stick". Most dogs have a natural fear of that kind of a thing in human hands. Show him it won't hurt. Keep it fun. Remember that it is much easier to avoid a setback than to correct one. Use this method until he gets the idea. It shouldn't take long.

Once your dog is trained at moving out in front of you, you can start working with a light weight. Hook the dog to a light weight, give him the command to pull; and closely observe his reaction. Many dogs will move right out with hardly a glance at the "thing" behind them. Others will stop or sit down as soon as they feel the pressure on the harness. Some may panic, and try to run back to you for reassurance. With a lot of verbal encouragement, most dogs will quickly become accustomed to the feel of the harness and move forward. If your dog refuses to pull even a light weight, try the cord-and-post method until he gets the idea.

If at any point in training, the dog gets sloppy, correct the problem immediately. It's much easier to prevent a bad habit than it is to change one, so don't hesitate to backtrack if he refuses to pull.



Glacier being driven from behind.
Photo by Robert Brunn

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL CONDITIONING

Many people who spend considerable time training a weight-puller are puzzled when he fares poorly in competition. In many cases, the dog fails because his training program has not included the necessary mental and physical conditioning. These aspects are often neglected by the novice trainer who feels that proper pulling form and success with light weights is sufficient.

The dog who is mentally prepared for competition shows enthusiasm for the process of pulling weight. He has confidence in his ability to pull and can concentrate on the task at hand in spite of distractions. He also knows that his handler is very much a part of the weight-pulling "team", offering constant encouragement.

A major point to remember is the great influence you have over your dog. Attitudes are contagious, and you can instill considerable enthusiasm and confidence in him simply by being enthusiastic and confident yourself. If you approach each training session as an ordeal, your dog may quickly feel the same way. Using treats for training is a somewhat controversial subject. While they may work well in training, they are strictly forbidden in competition. The dog who is used to being rewarded with a dog yummie instead of verbal praise may refuse to pull without treats. You should probably avoid their use if possible.

Your dog's confidence is increased by successful performance, and you must convince him that he can always pull the load, no matter how heavy. If your dog is unable to pull a weight, you should <u>always</u> help the dog move the load by pushing it yourself. This is also true at competitions, where you frequently see handlers pushing the sled after the dog's maximum pull has been reached. One of the quickest ways to destroy the confidence of a young dog is to increase the weight too rapidly; 30 to 50 pounds increments are plenty at this stage of the game.

A weight-pulling competition usually includes a wide variety of distractions. Your dog may have to cope with masses of spectators munching hot dogs, small children, pet poodles, lots of noise, and the other dogs entered in the competition. A dog who is used to pulling in the peace and quiet of his own back yard may freak out completely when faced with the sights and sounds of a competition. While you cannot foresee every distraction, you can expose him to crowds and noise.

Conditions in the pulling area are frequently crowded with dogs and handlers all being jammed into a small area. Serious weight-pulling handlers hate an aggressive dog who lunges at every dog in sight. This type of behavior frightens less aggressive dogs, and can be dangerous. If you cannot convince your dog that his aggressive tendencies are unacceptable, don't bring him to a competition. Period!

Certainly the most neglected aspect of weight-pulling is that of physical conditioning. To turn in a top performance, your dog must be

in top condition, and it will take more than a nightly jog around the block to get him there. If you have access to a training cart, fine. If not, try running your dog with a bicycle. If you prefer, you can run with him yourself, just as far and as fast as you can; at least twice a week, every-day if possible. If you do plan to run with your dog, you might try hooking him to a light drag (a small tire works fine). This will help you keep up with him and increase his exercise at the same time. The main thing to remember is that he needs a lot of exercise and physical training. Try to achieve this in several different ways to promote his enthusiasm and prevent burnout. Keep it fun.

NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is a very important part of conditioning your dog for weight-pulling. The more you work your dog, the more stress you put on him. The demand for a balanced diet of protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals is critical.

You might feel that these problems are taken care of today because modern research has solved them and most of the commercial brands provide all the nutrients a dog needs and then some. Not necessarily so. We have come a long way and feeding the top-of-the-line commercial dog food is much better than the old-fashioned diet of raw meat and scraps.

The feeling used to be that because dogs are classed as carnivorous animals, they should eat nothing but meat. Some people still feed their dogs a diet that is primarily lean meat, thinking they're giving them the best. However, flesh is only a small part of the canine diet.

The wild animal consumes primarily blood, liver, stomach and internal organs containing partially digested grains and vegetable matter.

Modern commercial dog foods tend to approximate the biologically balanced diets that nature provides and actually do a better job. Like any other commercial activity, the pet food industry is profit motivated and competitive. The less expensive brands usually have more cereal which acts as a filler and less animal protein or inferior protein that is not well assimilated. Read the bag! The order of ingredients should list meat or meat by-products, instead of grain or vegetable, in at least three of the first five listings.

There are many high quality dog foods available. They cost more per pound, but not necessarily more per feeding. It is a higher quality food, so the dog will assimilate more of it and you won't have to feed him so much. Therefore, you can keep your dog leaner and healthier while providing superb nutrition with more complete utilization. You will also notice a healthier coat. The stool will also be darker and firmer because of more thorough digestability.

There are many vitamin supplements that can be added to your dog's diet, but they can be overdone and aren't recommended except for the heavily conditioned dog, unless you are knowledgeable on the subject.

A FEW FINAL TIPS

The Weigh In

When you go to a weight pull, try to get your dog weighed in as early as possible. I usually try to get my dogs weighed at least an hour and a half to two hours before they pull. However, before you get the dog weighed and you are wondering about your dog's weight - whether it will be over or not - you should give your dog ample time to relieve himself of solid waste and urine. This could mean 1 to 2 pounds of weight and what weight class the dog could be in.

The Competition and Weight Pull

The biggest and strongest looking dog in your weight class isn't necessarily going to be the winner. Remember, it is the attitude and the willingness to please which will be key elements to success.

You will want to watch your competition to see how well they pull. Don't always pass when they do, and don't always pull when they do. PULL YOUR OWN PULL. Do what you feel is best and what will give you the best advantage over your competitors.

Determining the Best Route

Always examine the weight pull course before your dog attempts to make the pull. Select the best route for your dog to take and have the sled marshalls position the sled where you want it. Remember, you have the RIGHT to have the sled put in any spot behind the starting line as long as the runners are perpendicular to the starting line. To determine the best route, you should make mental notes of the course by observing how your dog pulled and how your competitors pull. This will be helpful in your decision of which route to take.

Importance of Time

The time of your dog's pull is very important. As little as 1 second or less can mean the difference between winning and second place. So I must stress the importance of recall or calling of your dog as I had mentioned earlier in this booklet.

Understand that your dog will have his bad days just as you do. Try to end every lesson on a positive note. If he just can't seem to get what you are trying to teach him today, back track to something that he does know so you can end the session with success. Tomorrow is another day. The training process can be a very gradual one. Weeks may pass

without seeing much progress. Training a weight puller is very similar to training an athelete. You are the coach; he is the athelete. It has been my experience that the dog athelete usually holds up his end of the partnership better than the coach. It takes a lot of love, patience and understanding. If you can contribute these to the process of training, your dog will reward you with his best possible performance.

WHERE TO GET EQUIPMENT OR INFORMATION

Most of the equipment used in weight pulling and dog sledding can be homemade. By its very nature, it is a low profile sport and finding a dealer that handles the equipment can be difficult for a beginner. There are many outlets for harnesses and other equipment all across the country. One way to find them in your area is to ask questions. Check with your local dog training clubs, at weight pulls and dog sled races, dog specialty stores, etc. Most pet shops or hardware stores won't know what you are talking about. Many dealers advertise in the Mushers Monthly News Team & Trail, Center Harbor, New Hampshire 03226. Another good source of information on equipment, as well as weight pulling in general, is through the International Weight Pull Association; Mike Sternberg, President; 3455 Railroad Avenue; Post Falls, Idaho 83854.

WEIGHT PULL RULES

Rules can vary from pull to pull, depending on the organization that governs the event. Most of the rules adopted by the different sponsoring organizations are similar. They vary most often in the weight classes and the increment of weight that is added after each pull. Be sure to understand the specific rules that you will be governed by and know what the local interpretation of those rules are.

I have chosen to print a copy of the rules adopted by the International Weight Pull Association. As is the case with all rules, they are subject to change. Always make sure you are familar with the current official rules that govern your event.

1987-1988 RULES

I. SECTION I - Physical Area

A. SNOW

The weight pulling chute shall be in an area not less than ten (10) feet but no more than twenty (20) feet wide, and not less than thirty-five (35) feet long. The chute will be open on the end toward which the pull is made. This chute shall be as level as hard packed snow permits. If there is any perceptible slope to the chute, the direction of the pull shall be toward the higher end. There shall be at least one (1) physical barrier separating the crowd from the chute. Dogs shall achieve traction on the same surface as that on which the sled rides.

B. WHEELED

The dimensions and the description of the weight pull chute shall be the same for wheeled pulls as for snow pulls. The chute shall be as level and firm as conditions permit. Acceptable surfaces shall be grass, hard packed dirt, gravel or carpet. Dogs shall achieve traction on the same surface as that on which the cart rides.

C. HOLDING AREA

A safe and adequate holding area shall be provided for both snow or wheeled pulls. All competing dogs shall remain in a marked or designated holding area. This area should be behind the pulling chute and no closer than thirty (30) feet behind the starting line. The holding area shall adequately and safely hold the number of dogs in competition.

II. SECTION 2 - Equipment

A. SNOW

The sled must be capable of safely carrying a load of 4000 lbs. The two runners must be two (2) to four (4) inches wide and at least seven (7) feet long on the contact surface and curved at the front end in a reasonable manner for a sled. The runners shall consist of a p-tex material or a steel runner. The sled must be a minimum of thirty (30) inches in width and no more than forty-eight (48) inches in width. The sled shall be provided with an adequate bridle and tugline of total length so that the point of attachment to the dog's harness will not exceed six (6) feet from the sled. The bridle shall be made of rope or nylon. Chains or cable will not be allowed. The sled bridle shall be tied together at a point 2' - 3' in front of the sled. It shall continue the remainder of the 6' in a single form. The bridle will look like a Y. For the thirty-five (35) pound class a smaller and lighter sled may be substituted as approved by the Chief Judge.

B. WHEELED

If the pull is held on a surface other than snow, a wheeled cart shall be used. It must be capable of safely carrying a load of 4000 lbs. The cart must have four (4) pneumatic tires which must all have the same air pressure prior to the event. The tires shall not be less that eight (8) inches in height and no more than eighteen (18) inches in height. A spare tire for the cart should be available at the pull site (This shall be mandatory for the 88-89 weight pull season.) The bridle shall be made of rope or nylon. Chains or cable will not be allowed. The cart bridle shall not be tied. The snap should be able to slide freely from side to side. This bridle will look like a long V.

C. WEIGHT

An adequate supply of pre-weighed, inert material suitable for safe stable stacking shall be provided. This is applicable for both snow and wheeled pulls.

D. BARRIERS

The chute barrier shall be a minimum of three (3) feet high and long enough so that dogs being driven from the rear will complete their pull within the barrier. The chute barrier shall be located at the very edge of the pulling pad, within the chute area. The best possible barriers should be encouraged, but any one material shall not be mandatory. The following would be considered appropriate chute barriers: plywood, snow fence, wood planks, hog panels and other materials that possess a bouncing-off or glancing ability when struck by the sled. (If the

sled or cart becomes stuck or lodged on a barrier, it would then be considered a tangle—see Tangle Rule V-D-9.)

A crowd barrier is required to separate the spectators a minimum distance of three (3) feet from the pulling chute. A rope barrier is considered adequate for this purpose.

III. SECTION 3 - Officials

A. SNOW & WHEELED

The event will be governed by the Chief Judge. To insure that the I.W.P.A. has qualified officials at its events, all Chief Judges shall be selected from a list approved by the I.W.P.A. Board of Directors. (A list of approved judges comes in the sanctioning kits, or is also available from the sanctioning director.)

1. The Chief Judge shall supervise the over-all event. He/She shall make all final decisions in any protest or dispute, before, during, and after the event. The Chief Judge has the right to disqualify any dog or handler for any violation of the rules or unsportsmanlike conduct, before, during and after the event.
2. The organizer of the event shall be responsible for the completion of all forms and information required by the I.W.P.A. and a statement verifying that all I.W.P.A. rules were adhered to. Failure to comply with I.W.P.A. rules, especially rules that deal with safety, the welfare of the dog, or put the I.W.P.A. in a liable situation, shall be grounds for loss of sanctioning including insurance coverage.
3. The Sled Course Marshall shall be responsible for the safe and proper stacking of weight on the sled/cart, proper positioning of the sled/cart, hooking up of the dogs to the sled/cart, breaking the sled when pulling on snow, and maintenance of the pulling course.
4. A qualified timer shall time each pull and report that time directly to the official recorder. The recorder shall post the weight pulled and the time required to the official score sheet. (The timer and recorder shall be supervised by the Chief Judge.)

IV. SECTION 4 - Contestants

A. ELIGIBILITY

1. All contestants must be either a regular member of the I.W.P.A. or a provisional member to enter a dog in competition in any I.W.P.A. sanctioned weight pull.
2. All dogs must be at least one (1) year of age to compete in any I.W.P.A. event.

3. All dogs must by currently immunized against any contagious canine diseases (hepatitis, distemper, leptospirosis, parvovirus, kennel cough, etc.) Use of all controlled drugs, stimulants or depressants shall be strictly prohibited. If an organization intends to test for illegal drug medications, it shall be declared so on the entry form.
4. All contestants shall fill out an official I.W.P.A. entry form or its approved equivalent and sign it. Approval of a non-official entry form shall be up to the Chief Judge.
5. No bitch in season shall be allowed to compete or allowed on the pull premises.
6. No pregnant bitch shall be allowed to compete in an I.W.P.A. event.
7. For the safety and protection of the dog, all dogs shall be fitted properly with a freight or weight pull type harness.

B. HANDLER CONDUCT AND CONTROL OF DOGS

All entrants shall be responsible for the conduct of their dogs and handler before, during and after the event. Vicious or unmanageable dogs shall be barred from competition. Unsportsmanlike conduct shall be cause for disciplinary action or disqualification. All dogs shall be under physical control, on a short lead, while in the pull area, except when hooked to the sled or cart. All handlers shall be responsible for the cleaning up after their own dogs. Abusive or inhumane treatment of a dog shall be strictly prohibited and shall be cause for disqualification.

C. WEIGHT CLASSES

35 pounds - all dogs weighing 35 lbs. or less.

60 pounds - all dogs weighing more than 35 lbs. up to and including 60 lbs.

80 pounds - all dogs weighing more than 60 lbs. up to and including 80 lbs.

100 pounds - all dogs weighing more than 80 lbs. up to and including 100 lbs.

120 pounds - all dogs weighing more than 100 lbs. up to and including 120 lbs.

Unlimited - all dogs weighing more than 120 lbs.

All weights shall be rounded off to the lowest whole pound. EXAMPLE: A dog weighing 60 3/4 lbs. would be recorded as 60 lbs.

D. WEIGH-INS

All dogs shall be weighed prior to each I.W.P.A. sanctioned weight pull (multiple or consecutive day pulls by the same organization require only one weigh-in). The weigh-in shall be no more than 24 hours prior to competition. All recorded dog weights shall be rounded to the lowest whole pound.

V. SECTION 5 - The Contest

A. ORGANIZING CLUB OPTION

The organizing club has the option to run the weight pull event class by class or in conjunction with another class or to run the event concurrently (one class at a time).

B. COMPETING IN HEAVIER WEIGHT CLASSES

The dog that wins its weight class shall not be allowed to compete in the next weight class. However the winning dog shall be allowed to pull as many times as it wants to establish a top percentage pull. These percentage pulls shall be at the established load increment or more.

C. PROCEDURE OF THE WEIGHT PULL EVENT

1. Each dog shall be required to pull a loaded sled/cart a measured sixteen (16) feet within sixty (60) seconds.
2. If the sled/cart is in motion at the expiration of sixty (60) seconds, the dog shall be allowed to complete the pull and the actual time required to make the pull shall be recorded.

3a. During the pull the handler may be no further forward than the front of the sled/cart or behind the designated line twenty (20) feet from the starting line.

3b. No physical handling of the dog shall be allowed once the dog is in position in front of the sled/cart. Handling consists of anyone touching the dog, its harness, the sled, or any other part of the equipment or load once the time/pull has begun.

3c. Only one handler is allowed to communicate with the dog, either with hand signals and/or voice commands from the course area.

3d. The handler shall be allowed to position his/her dog anywhere in front of the starting line at the end of the extended tug line. The dog shall be positioned with enough slack in the tug line to prevent the dog from inadvertently moving the sled or cart. There shall not be so much slack as to allow a "sling shot start".

4. The handler may pass one or two turns but must pull on the

third turn. (Dogs are no longer required to pull the starting weight.)

5. Starting weights to be pulled shall not exceed 200 lbs. for the 35 pound class, 400 lbs. for the 60 pound class, 450 lbs. for the 80 pound class, 500 lbs. for the 100 pound class, 550 lbs. for the 120 pound class and 600 lbs. for the unlimited class.

   These weights are maximum starting weights. If poor pulling conditions exist, the Chief Judge may adjust the starting weights lower to match the conditions.

6. The time will start once the handler has instructed the dog to pull.

7. When on snow, the sled shall be broken in the following manner: when the dog is called from the front, the sled shall be broken in a continuous motion until the handler crosses the sixteen (16) foot line (finish line); when driven from behind, the sled shall be broken until the handler leaves the dog's head.

8. Two false starts on any one turn by the dog shall constitute the dog's removal from the competition.

9. The handler has the option of having the sled/cart placed anywhere behind the starting line as long as the runners or wheels are perpendicular to the line.

10a. In the event of a tangle, the judge will stop the clock and the handler must realign the dog and harness before the pull is resumed. Two tangles on the same turn will constitute the dog's removal from the competition.

10b. If the sled/cart becomes stuck on a barrier of the pulling pad it shall be considered a tangle. The clock would be stopped and the sled/cart would then be freed of the barrier at the point of which it was stuck. The dog would be allowed to continue the pull with the remaining time left on the clock. Two tangles on the barrier on the same turn shall constitute the dog's removal from competition.

10c. Tangles are called at the Chief Judge's discretion. A tangle shall be called by the judge only if the dog or any of the equipment in use becomes entangled.

11. If any part of the harness or other equipment breaks, the handler shall repeat the pull after repairs. He/She may choose to accept this interrupted pull as a pass.

12. No food, treats, bait, whips, noisemakers, muzzles, or any related aid shall be permitted to be used from the time the event begins until the dog is eliminated from competition

and removed from the pull area. Handlers shall not have food or bait on their person during the competition.

13. No dogs, including those not entered in competition shall be allowed in the area ahead of the starting line, except the dog that is pulling.
14. There shall be a marked "on deck" area, behind, but near the starting end of the pull chute. This marked area shall house only the next dog to pull.
15. Load increments shall be determined by the Chief Judge and a 2/3 majority of the handlers. (A load increment usually considered appropriate for the 35 pound class is 40 to 50 lbs. For the larger classes it may be as much as 100 to 200 lbs. or more.) The Chief Judge shall recommend the load increments to the handlers, considering the pulling conditions and the welfare of the dogs.
16. The dog pulling the most weight in its class is declared the winner. Each successive dog pulling a lower weight is placed second, third, etc. If two or more dogs pull the same weight the required distance and can pull no more weight the full distance, the winner is determined by the fastest time in the previous pull.
17. If the dog is competing for the best percentage pull, he may continue to pull successively heavier weights. The weight increments shall be at the designated load increments or more.
18. The maximum number of dogs handled in a given weight class by one handler shall be limited to no more than two (2) dogs per weight class.

VI. SECTION 6 - Points

A. THE BASIS ON WHICH POINTS WILL BE AWARDED

In order for a weight pull to be recognized and points recorded, it shall be the responsibility of the weight pull organization to properly report the weight pull results to the I.W.P.A. as outlined in the sanctioning package, by the sanctioning director.

In order for a dog to be eligible and counted for points he must be entered and eligible as described in IV. SECTION 4 - CONTESTANTS, A. ELIGIBILITY. Each dog will receive one (1) point for each dog defeated in his class. The last place dog in each class will earn 1/2 point, providing they have made at least one successful pull. Dogs failing to make a successful pull shall be counted for points but will receive no points. In addition:

5 points will be awarded for the first place

3 points will be awarded for the second place

1 point will be awarded for the third place

The dog's four best pulls will be counted in the final standing. Wheeled events will be kept separate from the snow events.

B. With an approved I.W.P.A. Chief Judge, dogs competing in non-sanctioned events or fun pulls shall be eligible to earn legs toward working dog titles.

VII. SECTION 7 - Reporting Results

All forms must be completed with appropriate signatures and statistics and postmarked no later than 5 days following the event.

VIII. SECTION 8 - Protests

Any entrant protesting a violation of the rules shall do so immediately following the round. The protest may be verbal but shall be followed by a written statement directed to the Chief Judge with one (1) hour after the end of the contest. A hearing shall be scheduled and a decision rendered. The decisions of the Chief Judge are final.

IX. SECTION 9 - Weight Pull Season

The weight pull season shall run from November 1 through May 1.

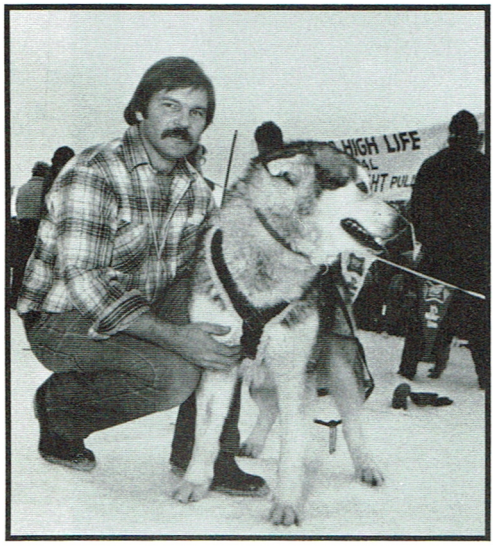
AUTHOR AND PARTNER

Mike Sternberg was born into a active outdoor family in 1946. He started training dogs in his early teens working with bird dog breeds. In the mid-seventies his interest was captured by the northern breeds and the sport of dog sledding. Today he raises and trains Alaskan Malamute dogs. Along with recreational sledding, he will generally enter two "freight races" a year and compete in weight pull events all over the Northwest and Canada.

Mike works for the U.S. Forest Service as a Fire Control Specialist. He has been on the Board of Directors or President of several dog organizations. He is the current President of the International Weight Pull Association. In 1985 he was awarded "Handler of the Year" by the Association.

Mike's partner is Glacier, an eight year old male Malamute who has entertained thousands of spectators. He has been the star of a TV commercial and inspired a book. Glacier is the only dog of any breed that has ever won both a show championship (American and Canadian) and the International Sled Dog Racing Association's World Champion Gold Medal Weight Puller in the 110 pound class.

Mike and Glacier work together to keep alive the working dog heritage and tradition. Mike wrote "Teach Your Dog To Pull" so that you and your partner can enjoy the same good experiences that he and Glacier have shared. Have Fun!!



Mike Sternberg with I.S.D.R.A. and I.W.P.A. Weight Pull Champion "Glacier"
Coeur d'Alene Press Photo